

EXCERPT OF SUMMARY REPORT FOR STAFF SITE VISIT MARCH 10 & 11, 2004 TO SIMPSON CREEK AND FOUR OF ITS TRIBUTARIES

Simpson Creek and tributaries

The following observations regard the main stem of Simpson Creek and the following tributaries: Blue Suck Branch, Downey Branch, Piney Mountain Branch, and North Branch Simpson Creek. The majority of Blue Suck Branch, Downey Branch, Piney Mountain Branch, and North Branch Simpson Creek and their tributaries are within US Forest Service property boundaries.

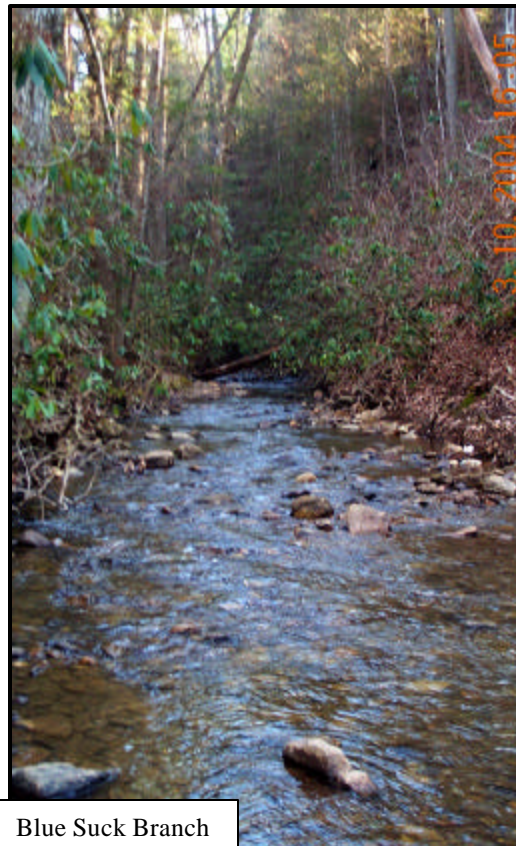
The bulk of the main stem of Simpson Creek is paralleled on either side by Route 60 and Interstate 64 and, in fact, is bordered by these major roadways for long distances. Although an attractive stream in some places and possessing an excellent benthic community, Simpson Creek did not meet the exceptional environmental setting criteria until we arrived at the reach that is in the National Forest, upstream from Longdale Furnace. From the junction of Route 776 and Route 60 near Longdale Furnace, the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) designates Simpson Creek and its tributaries upstream to their headwaters Class II wild trout waters. At that site, it did have a diverse benthic macroinvertebrate community with 21 families of mostly pollution sensitive organisms. This was surprising since upstream of this reach, Route 60 and Interstate Highway 64 border the stream on both sides. At this site, the stream is open to recreational use for a short distance.



Mainstem Simpson Creek
above Longdale Furnace

Blue Suck Branch

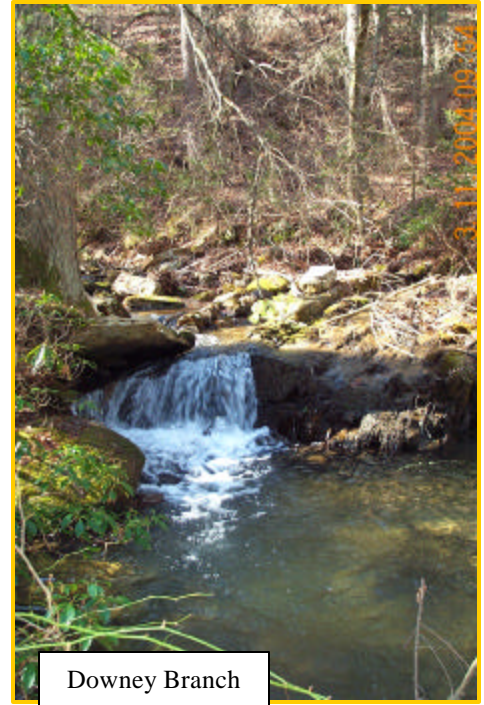
A diverse benthic macroinvertebrate community was surveyed at this site which was just inside the USFS property boundary of the Longdale Furnace Recreation Area. The benthic macroinvertebrates were mostly pollution sensitive organisms. Once upstream of the private/developed area of this stream, it appears to be in an exceptional environmental setting. According to the USFS map for the James River Ranger District, several hiking trails are located around Blue Suck Branch and it is open to anglers. Therefore, it should meet the exceptional recreational opportunity criteria. It is designated by the DGIF as Class III trout waters.



Blue Suck Branch

Downey Branch

A cursory benthic survey indicated a diverse benthic macroinvertebrate community at this site and the majority were pollution sensitive organisms. Juvenile brook trout were observed as were red spotted newts, two-lined salamanders, and salamanders of the genus *Desmognathus*. All of the aforementioned organisms are also considered pollution intolerant. Downey Branch is within the USFS boundary in the Longdale Furnace Recreation Area and is designated by DGIF as Class III trout waters. All staff concurs that Downey Branch meets all three eligibility criteria.



Downey Branch

Piney Mountain Branch:

Similar to Blue Suck Branch and Downey Branch, this stream was surveyed within the USFS boundary. A cursory survey of the benthic community found 15 families of mostly pollution sensitive organisms. It appeared to have a diverse macroinvertebrate community as well as an exceptional environmental setting. On the USFS map, there appears to be a tract of private property in the mid-reaches of the stream. Except for that property, it appears that the area around the stream is open to recreational opportunities.

North Branch Simpson Creek

This stream is also within USFS land, specifically, the Rich Hole Wilderness Area and is protected from certain types of uses. Motorized vehicles are not allowed in the wilderness area, as well as, mechanized equipment like bikes, carts, and wagons. It had a diverse benthic macroinvertebrate community with 15 families of mostly pollution sensitive organisms. Two juvenile brook trout were observed, as were salamanders of the genus *Desmognathus*.



Piney Mountain Branch

North Branch Simpson Creek and its tributaries are designated by DGIF as Class II wild trout waters. It had an exceptional environmental setting. According to the USFS map, Rich Hole Trail parallels this stream to the headwaters so it is open to recreational opportunities such as hiking, backpacking, and fishing.

Conclusion

After consideration of all observations at selected sites on the nominated segment of the Cowpasture River and Simpson Creek and its tributaries, DEQ staff has determined that the nominated segment of the Cowpasture River satisfies the Exceptional Environmental Setting criteria and Exceptional Aquatic Community eligibility criteria necessary for consideration for designation as Exceptional State Waters. It is extremely rare to find such a large stream with so little anthropogenic stress in Virginia. Therefore, it is literally exceptional. The majority of the main stem of Simpson Creek meets neither the aesthetic nor recreational criteria for an Exceptional State Waters designation, **but all surveyed tributaries to Simpson Creek appear to meet all eligibility criteria.**



North Branch
Simpson Creek